

[From the Washington Post, May 11, 2007]

THE SHUNNING OF A STATE

(By Chen Shui-bian)

In recent years the outbreak and spread of avian flu has brought illness, death and economic peril to countries in Asia and elsewhere. Memories of the fear, pain and suffering that accompanied the 2003 SARS outbreak—after failed coverups by the Chinese government—are still vivid in many places. While disease heeds no national borders, Taiwan has had to fight pandemics without help from the World Health Organization—a humanitarian agency that is supposed to serve all humankind.

Taiwan is not a member of the WHO, nor is it an observer at the World Health Assembly (WHA)—unlike the Palestinian Authority or the Malta Order of Chivalry. But under mounting international pressure prompted by fear of an avian flu pandemic, China was persuaded in 2005 to consent, in principle, to Taiwan's meaningful participation in WHO conferences focusing on that threat. China conceded after demanding that the WHO secretariat sign a secret memorandum of understanding. As a result, Taiwan's participation in the WHO is subject to China's approval, even for technical meetings. Such participation is minimal rather than meaningful.

It is improper and unprecedented for an international humanitarian organization to enter into a secret pact with one of its member states, especially an authoritarian one. More important, the memorandum has been used to obstruct Taiwan's participation in WHO activities. Our representatives were unable to attend the majority of conferences they sought admission to last year. The WHO secretariat has effectively jeopardized the health of people in Taiwan and other countries.

For a decade, we have striven relentlessly to participate in the WHO, to no avail. Even our humble pursuit of "meaningful participation" has yielded little success. With 95 percent of the Taiwanese people supporting full WHO membership, I must act upon the will of my people as a democratically elected president.

On April 11, I sent a letter to the WHO formally requesting our nation's application for membership under the name "Taiwan." The secretariat responded on April 25, claiming that Taiwan is not a sovereign state and therefore is not eligible for WHO membership. This is legally and morally deplorable.

Article 3 of the Constitution of the World Health Organization stipulates: "Membership in the Organization shall be open to all States," while Article 6 provides that states such as Taiwan that are not members of the United Nations "may apply to become Members and shall be admitted as Members when their application has been approved by a simple majority vote of the Health Assembly." Rule 115 of the WHA Rules of Procedure stipulates that "Applications made by a State for admission to membership . . . shall . . . be addressed to the Director-General and shall be transmitted immediately" to WHO members.

Clearly, the authority to determine whether Taiwan is eligible for admission to the WHO belongs to its members, many of which have diplomatic relations with Taiwan and cannot be co-opted by any individual or administrative office.

When East Germany applied for WHO membership in 1968, many questioned its sovereignty and the legitimacy of its government. But East Germany's application was circulated, and although it was voted down that year, it was approved in 1973.

Taiwan, formally known as the Republic of China, is indisputably a sovereign state, satisfying all of the criteria cited in Article 1 of

the Montevideo Convention on the Duties and Obligations of States: It has a permanent population, a defined territory, a functional government and the capacity to conduct relations with other states. It also has its own internationally traded currency and issues its own passport, honored by virtually all other nations.

Another broadly affirmed criterion for recognizing the legitimacy of a state is the principle, enunciated in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the sovereignty a state exercises should be based on the will of the people. A truly "sovereign" state, in other words, is free and democratic. We find no better words to describe Taiwan.

Ultimately, the question of Taiwan's participation in the WHO is a moral one. The systematic shunning of Taiwan is unconscionable not only because it compromises the health of our 23 million people but also because it denies the world the benefit of our abundant public health and technical resources. Taiwan's public and private sectors have donated more than \$450 million in medical and humanitarian aid to more than 90 countries over the past 10 years.

We in Taiwan are grateful that many governments and legislative bodies such as the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament have supported our bid for observer status in the WHA. As humankind seeks to control global pandemics, victory will require collaboration that is not restricted by political obfuscation or subject to discriminatory picking and choosing of participants. We must not allow an all-but-one scenario to undermine our common mission—health for all.

H.R. 2922, THE PAY VETERANS FIRST ACT

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Pay Veterans First Act (H.R. 2922), introduced by my colleague from New York, Mr. HALL.

When most people think of a "bonus," they think of a financial incentive given to reward exceptional work done above and beyond the call of duty. It is typically recognition of the long and countless hours of hard work put in to get the job done. It is something you earn, not something you receive in return for lackluster performance.

Yet, recently the Associated Press reported that top officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs received a total of \$3.8 million in bonuses, with some individuals receiving as much as \$33,000, or 20 percent of their annual salary. While these officials received these performance based rewards, the VA was facing a nearly \$1 billion budgetary shortfall and the national backlog for veterans' claims is about 177 days on average. There are very few veterans in eastern Connecticut or across the country who would agree that this data demonstrates "exceptional work" on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

It is appalling that the failing performance of top VA officials would be rewarded so handsomely while the quality of care for our Nation's veterans suffers. The veterans of eastern Connecticut and those throughout the Nation deserve an explanation for this apparent error in judgment and disgraceful lack of leadership within the Department of Veterans Af-

fairs. I recently wrote to Secretary Jim Nicholson asking him to provide an explanation for this imbalance and look forward to his response.

There are, without a doubt, many people in veterans' health care facilities across the country working tirelessly to care for our veterans without the resources they need, let alone discretionary bonuses. The VA is strained to care for the patients they have now, and face daunting challenges to care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pay Veterans First Act is an important step to ensuring that the priorities and resources of the VA remain focused on where they rightfully belong: the needs of those who have served our country in uniform, and not the bureaucrats in Washington.

I applaud Mr. HALL of New York for leading this important effort and urge my colleagues to support this bill on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

TRIBUTE TO HOWARD L. BRIGHAM

HON. MARILYN N. MUSGRAVE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor a true American hero who proudly served our country in World War II. Howard L. Brigham was born in 1925 in Denver, Colorado, the oldest of eight children. After serving our country in the war, Howard served Colorado for 37 years as an educator and administrator.

In December of 1942, one year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Howard joined the United States Navy at the young age of 17. He was unable to be present for his own high school graduation. Howard manned a 20 millimeter gun and served as a deck boss's mate on the Seaplane Tender, USS *Matagorda*. Howard served primarily in the Atlantic theater, but he also spent time in the South Pacific. He was briefly in port in Iceland, England, Wales, North Africa, and Brazil. He was away from his family the entire 4 years of the war and spent most of that time at sea. Howard's father passed away during this time and he was unable to leave his duties to attend the funeral. Seaman 2nd Class Brigham was awarded the American Theater Medal, the European Theater Medal and the Good Conduct Medal.

Following his heroic service, Mr. Brigham attended the University of Denver earning both a bachelors and a masters degree in education. For the next 37 years he served as a teacher, counselor, and principal in the Denver Public School system and the Poudre School System in Fort Collins. He and his wife Jeanie will celebrate 60 years of marriage in June of this year. Together they raised three children, Jerry Brigham of Broomfield, and Randy Brigham and Kay Rich of Sterling.

We are so fortunate to live in this great country where freedom is something that we rarely have to think about and often take for granted. It is simply a way of life for us, and we are truly blessed to live in a country whose citizens willingly volunteer to put themselves in harm's way to defend and protect our great Nation.

I am proud to honor Mr. Brigham for his dedicated service to our Nation. Howard is an